

The LAY-MONK.

*Hujusmodi paucas Poetæ reperiunt Comœdias,
- Ubi boni meliores fiant. Plaut.*

FRIDAY, December 4. 1713.

SIR William Temple speaking, in some of his Writings, of such Persons as affect rather to be distinguish'd by the Briskness of their Imaginations, than by any proper Application of their Abilities, says, He knew a Statesman that had rather have said a Witty Thing, than done a Wise One; and had rather have made the Company laugh, than the Nation rejoice.

The describing this Affectation in a Grave Character, places it in a very strong Light. Every one is immediately shock'd with the Notion of a Merry Judge, or a Facetious Divine; and yet it wou'd be proportionably ridiculous in any Person whatsoever, who shou'd seem to make Mirth the principal Business of his Life; as if Man were to be distinguish'd from Brute Animals by Risibility only, and not by Reason.

I might mention the Immoralities which an excessive Affectation of raising Mirth is apt to betray Men into, such as sacrificing a Worthy Character, a Friend, and sometimes a Man's Self, and his greatest Interests to the petulant Pleasure of a Jest; but my Design is only to consider it here as a Fault of the Understanding. And in this View it is the Parent of a world of false Wit, and forc'd Conceits, and more frequently disturbs Conversation than enlivens it. I remember a Fellow of this Turn, who was famous about Town for making Similies; he had turn'd all the Powers of his Mind to this single Attainment; and it was the whole Employment of his Life, to tell you with a ridiculous Vivacity of Imagination what any Thing which was mention'd or done in his Company was like. To the same Spring we owe many Writings of forc'd Humour and Raillery, such Writers designing nothing but to raise a Laugh, and not considering that mis-apply'd Raillery is only Ill-Nature, and that Humour without a Moral is no more than Buffoonery.

(Price Three Half-pence.)

If ever Mirth can lay claim to a full Scope and Indulgence, it is in the Business of Comedy; and yet I will venture to say, that a Comick Poet who shou'd only propose to himself the raising of Laughter, whatever might be his Success in that, wou'd be but a wretched Writer. It is this that has given occasion to distinguish such low Performances by the Name of *Farce*. It is not the lively Jest, the smart Repartee, or the witty Conceit; but the natural Views of Life, the moral Painting, the Manners, the Passions, the Follies, the Singularities, and Humours; in a Word, it is the Human Heart in all its odd Variety, pleasantly represented, that makes up the elegant Entertainment of Comedy. In this the Author presents Mankind to his Audience; in the other Way of Writing he only exhibits himself.

I was never better pleas'd than with an uncommon Observation made by a celebrated modern Writer, concerning the *Heautontimorumenos* of Terence; namely, that in that excellent Comedy there are Passages which wou'd draw Tears from a Man of Sense, but not one that will provoke his Laughter. I believe the Reader will not be dissatisfy'd to see this Remark further exemplify'd by Two very fine Instances, the last of which that Ingenious Writer wou'd never have mention'd. The first is an Ancient Comedy of *Plautus*, the other is a Scene in the *Funeral*, or *Grief Alamode*, by Mr. Steele.

The whole Fable of the Comedy of the *Captives* in *Plautus* is of a serious Cast, and has something in it wonderfully amusing. *Hegio* had Two Sons, and had been depriv'd of them both: The first was stolen away when an Infant, by a perfidious Servant, who had sold him, but the Father did not know where. The other, whose Name was *Philopolemus*, was many Years afterwards taken in the Wars, and carry'd to *Eli*. *Hegio* lays out great Sums in the Purchase of several Captives taken by his Countrymen from the People of *Eli*, in Hopes he

he might meet with some one of Condition, who might be a Ransom for his Son. Among others he purchases a Master and his Servant; the first named *Philocrates*, the other *Tyndarus*. *Philocrates* was Son to a considerable Citizen of *Elis*; and to favour his obtaining his Liberty, the Master and Servant agree, on this Occasion, to exchange their Names. The Quality and Wealth of *Philocrates* are therefore own'd to *Hegio*, but the true Person conceal'd; and *Tyndarus*, who represents him, prevails with the old Man to send the other, who he pretends is his Servant, to *Elis*, to procure the Exchange of *Hegio's* Son *Philopolemus*; and at the same time stipulates to pay a Price, if the Messenger should not return. *Hegio* agrees to the Proposal, and *Philocrates* by this Means obtains his Liberty.

The Gratitude of a Servant to an indulgent Master, with whom he had long liv'd in great mutual Kindness, is wrought up in this Scene with the most beautiful Elegance. *Hegio* himself hearing the two Captives speak to one another with so much Affection in their common Calamity, breaks out into these Expressions, *Good Gods! what generous Minds have these Men! I cannot hearken to them without Tears.* At their Parting, *Tyndarus* begs *Philocrates* not to forget him when he was gone, but to remember that his Life stood engaged for him; and that he must expect to be put to Death, if he deserted him, or if the Negotiation prov'd unsuccessful.

Philocrates is no sooner gone, than *Aristophontes*, another Captive of *Elis*, whom *Hegio* had formerly bought, and who was a Kinsman of *Philocrates*, being brought to *Tyndarus*, to see if he knew him, discovers the Imposture. *Hegio* thinking himself now abused and cheated, sends *Tyndarus* among his other Slaves to hard Labour, and to suffer Chastisement. The Poet has given *Tyndarus* on this Occasion very noble Sentiments. He comforts himself in the Thought, that the Memory of his Gratitude to his Master will be perpetuated hereafter; and that, whatever may be his Lot, he does not die that gives up his Life for Virtue. The Slave that had discover'd him, when he sees on what Principles *Tyndarus* had acted, is touch'd, and cries out, He is glad *Philocrates* is at Liberty, but sorry that his Words had brought Punishment on the Man who had freed him.

In the Conclusion, *Philocrates* returns, and brings with him *Hegio's* Son *Philopolemus*, and likewise that false Servant who had formerly robb'd him. By Means of the latter, *Tyndarus*, who had been represented by the Poet with so liberal a Mind, is discover'd to be that Son of *Hegio* whom he had lost when a Child, and whose true Name was *Pegmion*, who being sold at that Time to the Father of *Philocrates*, was by him bestow'd on his Son, and bred with him from their Infancy. This beautiful Discovery concludes the Fable. It is plain that there is little in the whole to raise Mirth,

excepting the inconsiderable Part of the Sycophant; and the Poet, in his Epilogue, Part of which is placed as the Motto of this Paper, values himself upon this Entertainment, as of a more rais'd and elegant Kind than is to be met with in vulgar Comedies.

Of the same Kind is the Part of *Trusty* the Steward, in the Comedy of *Grief Alamode*. Every one will own, that in this Play there are many lively Strokes of Wit and Humour; but I must confess I am more pleas'd with the fine Touches of Humanity in it, than with any other Part of the Entertainment. When the honest Steward comes to the Lodgings of his disinherited young Lord, whom for many Years he had not seen; the fond Reflections he makes there, his Digressions from his Purpose, his embracing him with Tears, and running over every little Circumstance of the Family that cou'd feed his Tenderness, till he had lost himself in his Discourse; and then his recovering, begging Pardon, and coming to his present Business, are imagin'd with the utmost Delicacy. How natural and agreeable is that little Rambles of Thought, while he is waiting for him, *I was, I think, Three and Twenty when this young Lord was christen'd; what ado was there about calling him Francis!— These are but poor Lodgings for him; I cannot bear the Joy to think I shall save the Family from which I have had my Bread.—* I might transcribe his whole Speech afterwards, on his seeing his young Lord. But as it is so well known on the Stage, that there is no need of it, I shall conclude with observing, that this is not only Nature, but Nature of the most beautiful Kind; or, to borrow *Plautus's* own Remark, by the Representation of such Plays even good Men may be made better.

N. B. It being one End propos'd by the Society in this Paper, to cultivate a Conversation with the Absent, by which Means, they may at once relieve and improve their Retirement; all Gentlemen who will be pleas'd to communicate their Thoughts for the forwarding of our Design, are desired to direct their Letters, paying the Postage, to Mr. Jacob Ravenscroft, to be left at Mr. Roberts's in Warwick-Lane.

Note, Mr. Freeman makes the same Invitation to the Ladies.

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